

Finland's Mammals

Naturetrek Tour Report

9th – 16th July 2025



Eurasian Lynx



Grey Wolf



Wolverine



Brown Bear

Tour report by Jan Kelchtermans
Photos by Emma Corfield



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Trip participants: Jan Kelchtermans (leader) with eight Naturetrek clients

Summary

In terms of sightings, weather conditions, and group dynamics, this tour was among the better of the Naturetrek trips, which searched for all the special mammals during midsummer in Finland. We saw and photographed Eurasian Lynx, Moose, Siberian Flying Squirrel, Grey Wolves, Brown Bears, Wolverines, more Grey Wolves, Eurasian Beavers, and Finland's only endemic mammal: the Saimaa Ringed Seal.

Day 1

Wednesday 9th July

Jan already had a rental car from the previous trip, and it was thus convenient to meet the clients at the airport. A short trip briefing was given in the hotel lounge before everyone enjoyed a meal at the hotel restaurant. In the evening, we headed to a well-known meadow complex to observe ungulates: the main objective was Moose. Further north, where hunting is more intense, spotting them is not easy. But not far from the Finnish capital, the situation is completely different, as the Moose here are habituated to traffic, and to people who came to watch them!

As soon as we arrived at the familiar meadow, where one or more species of ungulate are usually present, Jan noticed an animal moving close towards us in the meadow. It was probably a Roe Deer, given its size and brownish colour. But, with binoculars in hand, the same guide completely 'lost control' as the animal turned out to be a Eurasian Lynx! This was completely, completely at odds with the standard here and everywhere in Finland regarding sightings of this species.

The Lynx had prey in its mouth: a sturdy European Hare. Because a strip of forest was not far away, the guide urged everyone to spot the animal first before leaving the vehicle to take photos. Everyone managed to do so without much difficulty. Some participants even managed to photograph the animal before it disappeared into the tall grass. This was absolutely crazy! Judging by the Eurasian Lynx's head markings, size and fur pattern, Jan also informed everyone that this was the same individual as during the first of the three consecutive 2025 Naturetrek trips, which always start here on the first evening. After all, the field where we made our observation was close to the earlier site, less than a kilometre away.

Even though the animal was hiding nearby and the sighting had been rather brief, we decided to leave the animal alone. Moving closer would have simply disturbed the animal. So instead of approaching the forest patch with tall grass, we gave the Eurasian Lynx all the time it needed to devour its prey. Instead, we continued the evening in complete relaxation, with sightings of several Moose (including a female with a very small calf), numerous White-tailed Deer, a single Roe Deer, several Fallow Deer, and European Hares in and around the meadow where we encountered the Eurasian Lynx!

With this early sighting of a Lynx, there was a very real chance that the clients would return home with all four species of apex predators at the end of the week!

Day 2**Thursday 10th July**

In the morning, we set off on a long drive toward the Gulf of Bothnia, near the city of Vaasa. After a 100% success rate during all previous Naturetrek tours here, we returned to this area hoping once again to observe Siberian Flying Squirrels. Upon arrival around noon, we enjoyed a buffet lunch with the guide who accompanied us to the squirrels later that evening.

Unlike last year, the squirrels were not active in the afternoon, so everyone was given some free time. There was also the option to attend a presentation by our guide. His photographs and deep knowledge of the Siberian Flying Squirrel clearly reflected years of dedication and passion for the species we were hoping to see. With a bit of luck, the evening would reward us: fingers crossed!

As usual, once we were there, we positioned ourselves around a location where a Siberian Flying Squirrel was known to be residing. Similar to our both visits during the previous weeks, this was still a nest box, originally placed by a researcher focusing on the breeding behaviour of Eurasian Pygmy Owls. But inside it was a furry creature instead of a feathered one. We were not dissatisfied!

Once again, our patience was tested as we waited a long time before we saw any activity of the target species. Once the sun was at its lowest point, the characteristic head of the female Siberian Flying Squirrel appeared at the nest box's opening. And we witnessed its gliding flight once it had ascended the trunk towards the top of the Norway Spruce from which the nest box hung. Again, by using a laser pointer, locating this tiny creature was much easier. Despite the short glides, it was not easy for everyone to maintain their footing or navigate the forest, which was characterised by a bumpy, moss-covered rocky surface. However, several participants managed to snap a few photos while the animal was grooming itself.

Day 3**Friday 11th July**

A second long drive followed in the morning, towards Kuhmo. After a meal at the hotel where we would stay for the next two days, the remaining forty-five-minute drive led to a former border post, now used as a base for ecotourism in the no-man's-land on the border with Russia. Everyone quickly packed a picnic to spend the night in Paradise; the nickname for a location where large carnivores rule. And sure enough, Brown Bears and Grey Wolves were present in good light. Also, the third carnivore, the Wolverine, turned up. But that took until well into the night, when it was darkest, to appear. Two participants in a separate hide appeared to have missed the sighting. Taking turns staying awake here all night long is not always easy. But that was certainly not the case today, when many of the carnivores were frequently observed in good light conditions. What was unusual about the Wolverine sighting was that it involved two different individuals chasing each other.

For those who missed the sighting, there was an alternative in the coming days. It was no big deal, as the next hide sessions were primarily focused on observing Wolverines. While Brown Bears and Grey Wolves exhibited the same behaviour as Wolverines (less present during daylight and shyer), Wolverines exhibited the exact opposite there!

Day 4**Saturday 12th July**

After resting and enjoying lunch, the search for Forest Reindeer began. However, the wild Forest Reindeer population in the Kainuu region, to which Kuhmo belonged, has faced challenges. The population had declined significantly from its peak of 1700 individuals in 2001. High predation pressure from the resident Grey Wolf population in the area and habitat changes due to commercial forestry pose the greatest threats to this subpopulation, which currently numbers around 800 individuals. In less than twenty-five years, the population has halved.

Moreover, the cold spring of 2025 had left very little green vegetation in the Kuhmo region, causing the animals to migrate elsewhere. Jan's local contacts informed him that this year's excursions, for both Moose and Forest Reindeer, were practically non-productive as a result. On top of that, the quiet area where Jan has consistently found the species in recent years during Naturetrek tours has also been experienced increased human activity. As on the first and second tours during previous weeks, the species was not found during the afternoon and evening excursions of this, the third Finland trip of the year. For the first time in all our summer tours here in Kuhmo, Jan did not manage to show the species to the clients this season.

Hopefully, we will have better luck next season, with more green vegetation in the Kuhmo region, and the reindeer not migrating elsewhere.

Day 5**Sunday 13th July**

After breakfast, we made a relatively short drive to Lieksa. For those who wanted extra provisions, a short pit stop was made at a local supermarket to help with the long wait in the hides. Upon arrival at the Wolverine base camp, we received a short briefing before splitting into subgroups to take up positions in the hides, both in the forest and by the lake.

Near the lake, some occupied the left section of the large hide on the hill, because the windows there offered the best views of the surroundings. Those more focused on photography used the smaller hides in the forest near the base camp. The night resulted in sightings of the alpha Grey Wolves near the lake for one hour around midnight. A Wolverine occurred in good light in the forest several times, with the alpha Grey Wolves there too at 3.30am.

And very importantly, those who missed the Wolverines in Kuhmo were still awake and present in the right place. This meant everyone, as predicted, now had all four large carnivores on their sighting list! It was truly extraordinary, and in addition, we still had one more night to spend in the hides here!

Day 6**Monday 14th July**

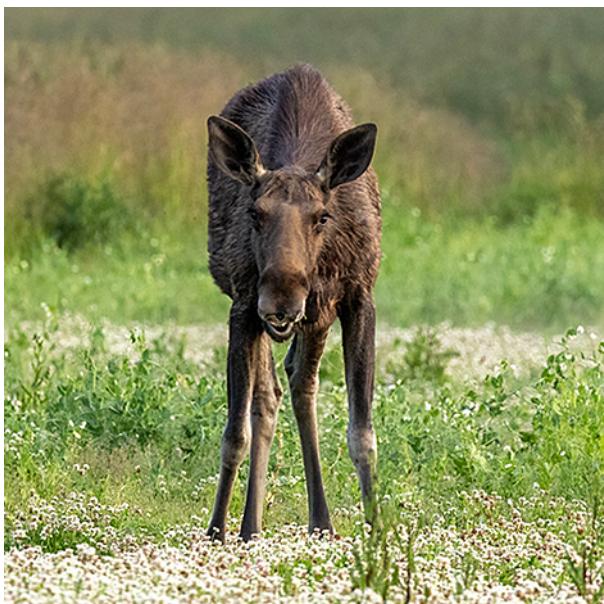
The morning followed one of the classic scenarios: transfer to the lodging, breakfast, sleep and lunch, before heading back to the Wolverine base camp. Since it was still very warm, we arrived at the hides a little later than usual. With the sun shining, they initially felt like saunas! The alpha Grey Wolf pair appeared in the forest, under ideal light conditions. A Wolverine appeared at midnight, and again at 4.00am. At the lake, they had to make do with a Wolverine around 1.00am.

Day 7

Tuesday 15th July

After breakfast, there was time to rest and/or pack. This was before the third long drive this trip: from Lieksa all the way to Lake Saimaa. The Saimaa Ringed Seal there was the last real target species of the trip. But first, we enjoyed a delicious meal and the luxury of the Lake Saimaa accommodations. This was very welcome after the 'rough' nights in hides in the remote border regions with Russia!

The conditions on the lake were ideal: blissful temperatures, not too many waves, and sunny. And the last target species cooperated. The boatman's initial sighting of a seal seemed at first to be something for the experienced spotter only: the seal seemed almost indistinguishable from the rock formation on which it was sunbathing. Only when we were really close did everyone recognise the animal's outline as fur and not rock.



Moose



Grey Wolf



Brown Bear



Saimaa Ringed Seal

Along the way, we enjoyed watching resident Ospreys at and near their nests, sailed into a bay that was home to two Eurasian Beavers, and saw several Black-throated Divers with and without young. We also took some time to savour the sandwiches and cinnamon rolls, with or without coffee or tea. What a way to end the trip!

Day 8

Wednesday 16th July

The classic drive to Helsinki followed, from where most participants headed home, and where Jan returned the rental car, after which he also returned home after more than a month in Finland. What a splendid season it had been once again!



Eurasian Lynx

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Species lists

Mammals

Common name	Scientific name	July 2025							
		23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30
European Hare	<i>Lepus europaeus</i>	✓							✓
Mountain Hare	<i>Lepus timidus</i>		✓		✓		✓		
Canadian Beaver	<i>Castor canadensis</i>								
Eurasian Red Squirrel	<i>Sciurus vulgaris</i>			✓	✓	✓	✓		
Siberian Flying Squirrel	<i>Pteromys volans</i>		✓						
Common Pipistrelle	<i>Pipistrellus pipistrellus</i>							✓	
Northern Serotine	<i>Eptesicus nilssonii</i>		✓						
Fallow Deer	<i>Dama dama</i>	✓							
Western Roe Deer	<i>Capreolus capreolus</i>	✓							
Elk (Moose)	<i>Alces alces</i>	✓							
Finnish Forest Reindeer	<i>Rangifer tarandus fennicus</i>								
White-tailed Deer	<i>Odocoileus virginianus</i>	✓							
Eurasian Lynx	<i>Lynx lynx</i>	✓						✓	
Red Fox	<i>Vulpes vulpes</i>								
Grey Wolf	<i>Canis lupus</i>			✓			✓		
Brown Bear	<i>Ursus arctos</i>			✓					
Saimaa Ringed Seal	<i>Pusa hispida saimensis</i>								
Wolverine	<i>Gulo gulo</i>							✓	
European Pine Marten	<i>Martes martes</i>								
Stoat	<i>Mustela erminea</i>								
Least Weasel	<i>Mustela nivalis</i>								

Birds

Common name	Scientific name
Whooper Swan	<i>Cygnus cygnus</i>
Northern Shoveler	<i>Spatula clypeata</i>
Eurasian Wigeon	<i>Mareca penelope</i>
Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>
Northern Pintail	<i>Anas acuta</i>
Eurasian Teal	<i>Anas crecca</i>
Tufted Duck	<i>Aythya fuligula</i>
Common Goldeneye	<i>Bucephala clangula</i>
Goosander	<i>Mergus merganser</i>
Red-breasted Merganser	<i>Mergus serrator</i>
Common Swift	<i>Apus apus</i>
Common Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>
Rock Dove / Feral Pigeon	<i>Columba livia</i>
Common Wood Pigeon	<i>Columba palumbus</i>
Eurasian Coot	<i>Fulica atra</i>
Common Crane	<i>Grus grus</i>
Red-necked Grebe	<i>Podiceps grisegena</i>
Great Crested Grebe	<i>Podiceps cristatus</i>
European Golden Plover	<i>Pluvialis apricaria</i>
Northern Lapwing	<i>Vanellus vanellus</i>
Eurasian Curlew	<i>Numenius arquata</i>
Eurasian Woodcock	<i>Scolopax rusticola</i>

Common name	Scientific name
Common Snipe	<i>Gallinago gallinago</i>
Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>
Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>
Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>
Common Greenshank	<i>Tringa nebularia</i>
Common Tern	<i>Sterna hirundo</i>
Black-headed Gull	<i>Chroicocephalus ridibundus</i>
Common Gull	<i>Larus canus</i>
European Herring Gull	<i>Larus argentatus</i>
Lesser Black-backed Gull	<i>Larus fuscus</i>
Red-throated Diver	<i>Gavia stellata</i>
Black-throated Diver	<i>Gavia arctica</i>
Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>
European Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis apivorus</i>
Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>
Eurasian Goshawk	<i>Astur gentilis</i>
Great Spotted Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos major</i>
Common Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>
Eurasian Hobby	<i>Falco subbuteo</i>
Eurasian Jay	<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>
Eurasian Magpie	<i>Pica pica</i>
Western Jackdaw	<i>Coloeus monedula</i>
Hooded Crow	<i>Corvus corone cornix</i>
Northern Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>
Bohemian Waxwing	<i>Bombycilla garrulus</i>
Coal Tit	<i>Periparus ater</i>
Willow Tit	<i>Poecile montanus</i>
Eurasian Blue Tit	<i>Cyanistes caeruleus</i>
Eurasian Skylark	<i>Alauda arvensis</i>
Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>
Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>
Western House Martin	<i>Delichon urbicum</i>
Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>
Eurasian Blackcap	<i>Sylvia atricapilla</i>
Lesser Whitethroat	<i>Curruca curruca</i>
Eurasian Wren	<i>Troglodytes troglodytes</i>
Eurasian Treecreeper	<i>Certhia familiaris</i>
Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>
Song Thrush	<i>Turdus philomelos</i>
Mistle Thrush	<i>Turdus viscivorus</i>
Redwing	<i>Turdus iliacus</i>
Common Blackbird	<i>Turdus merula</i>
Fieldfare	<i>Turdus pilaris</i>
Spotted Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa striata</i>
European Robin	<i>Erythacus rubecula</i>
Thrush Nightingale	<i>Luscinia luscinia</i>
European Pied Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hypoleuca</i>
Common Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus phoenicurus</i>
Northern Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe oenanthe</i>
House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
Dunnock	<i>Prunella modularis</i>
Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>

Common name	Scientific name
White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
Meadow Pipit	<i>Anthus pratensis</i>
Tree Pipit	<i>Anthus trivialis</i>
Eurasian Chaffinch	<i>Fringilla coelebs</i>
Brambling	<i>Fringilla montifringilla</i>
Eurasian Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula pyrrhula</i>
Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
European Greenfinch	<i>Chloris chloris</i>
Common Linnet	<i>Linaria cannabina</i>
Eurasian Siskin	<i>Spinus spinus</i>
Yellowhammer	<i>Emberiza citrinella</i>
Common Reed Bunting	<i>Emberiza schoeniclus</i>